

Message Text

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FM AMCONSUL BREMEN

TO AMEMBASSY BONN

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AMCONSUL MUNICH

AMCONSUL HAMBURG

AMCONSUL STUTTGART

AMCONSUL DUESSELDORF

USMISSION USBERLIN

AMEMBASSY BERLIN

AMCONSUL FRANKFURT BY POUCH

C O N F I D E N T I A L BREMEN 0253

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, GW

SUBJECT: SPD VICE CHAIRMAN KOSCHNICK'S PRELIMINARY VIEWS ON
OUTCOME OF 1976 BUNDESTAG ELECTIONS

1. I MET WITH SPD VICE CHAIRMAN, BREMEN MAYOR KOSCHNICK, ON THE EVE OF HIS DEPARTURE FOR THE UNITED STATES. IN RESPONSE TO MY QUERY, HE READILY GAVE HIS CURRENT ASSESSMENT OF THE PROSPECTS FOR THE CONTINUATION OF THE SPD/FDP COALITION, FOLLOWING THE OCTOBER ELECTIONS. KOSCHNICK ASSERTED THAT THE PERSONAL POPULARITY OF CHANCELLOR SCHMIDT, EXCEEDING BY FAR THAT OF CDU CHANCELLOR-CANDIDATE KOHL, IS THE SPD'S STRONGEST ELECTION ASSET. THE OTHER IS THE UNDENIABLE AND VIGOROUS UPSWING IN THE ECONOMY, WHICH, HE ANTICIPATES, WILL CONTINUE AT AN ACCELERATED RATE INTO AND BEYOND THE ELECTIONS. ON THE NEGATIVE SIDE HE SEES THE CONTINUATION OF A SIGNIFICANT LEVEL OF UNEMPLOYMENT AND THE DECLINE IN THE STANDING AMONG THE VOTERS OF THE SPD AS A PARTY. THE PARTY'S TASK, THEREFORE, WILL BE TO NARROW THE GAP BETWEEN SCHMIDT'S PERSONAL ATTRACTION AND VOTE-GETTING POWER AND THE DECLINING APPEAL OF THE SPD AS A PARTY.

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2. KOSCHNICK PROGNOSTICATES THAT THE FINAL ELECTION OUTCOME THIS YEAR WILL FALL SOMEWHERE BETWEEN THE RESULTS OF 1969 AND 1972 AND THAT SPD LOSSES WILL NOT BE MATCHED BY CORRESPONDING GAINS FOR THE CDU, BUT WILL IN PART ACCRUE TO THE BENEFIT OF THE FDP, ALTHOUGH THE FDP MAY RECORD LOSSES IN BADEN-WUERTEMBERG AND LOWER SAXONY. ANTICIPATING THAT THE FDP WILL AGAIN COMMIT ITSELF TO A COALITION WITH THE SPD, KOSCHNICK ASSUMES THAT THE SCHMIDT-LED GOVERNMENT WILL REMAIN IN POWER FOR THE NEXT 4-YEAR PERIOD. THE 1978 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION MAY OFFER THE CDU AND KOHL AN OPPORTUNITY FOR LOOSENING THE TIES BETWEEN THE SPD AND FDP WITH A VIEW TOWARD AN FDP/CDU COALITION FOR 1980.

3. ON THE ASSUMPTION OF SUCH AN OUTCOME, WHICH, KOSCHNICK BELIEVES, IS ALSO SHARED BY THE CDU/CSU, DESPITE ITS PUBLIC DISPLAY OF OPTIMISM, FRANZ-JOSEF STRAUSS WILL BE EFFECTIVELY REMOVED AS A CONTENDER FOR HIGH POLITICAL OFFICE IN BONN. HE WILL THEN BEGIN IN EARNEST TO FOCUS HIS ATTENTION ON THE BAVARIAN POLITICAL SCENE IN ANTICIPATION OF HIS SUCCEEDING GOPPEL AS MINISTER PRESIDENT.

4. COMMENTING ON THE LOCAL BREMEN SCENE, KOSCHNICK SAID THAT A PRIVATE OPINION POLL REVEALED A TREMENDOUS POPULARITY LEAD IN BREMEN FOR SCHMIDT OVER KOHL BY THE ALMOST INCREDIBLE PROPORTION OF 70 PERCENT FOR THE FORMER AND 20 PERCENT FOR THE LATTER. THIS GIVES SCHMIDT A HIGHER POPULARITY RATING THAN HE HAS EVEN IN HIS OWN HOME BASE IN HAMBURG. WITH REGARD TO THE PROSPECTS FOR THE BREMEN BUNDESTAG DELEGATION, KOSCHNICK SAID THAT BREMEN MAY SUCCEED IN REGAINING ITS 5TH SEAT IF VOTER PARTICIPATION IS HIGH. IN THAT EVENT, THE SPD WILL KEEP ITS THREE MANDATES, WHILE THE CDU MAY SUCCEED IN WINNING A SECOND BUNDESTAG SEAT.

5. COMMENTING ALSO ON DEVELOPMENTS IN NEIGHBORING NIEDERSACHSEN, KOSCHNICK SAID THAT HE MUST GIVE HIGH MARKS TO MINISTER PRESIDENT ALBRECHT, WHO HAS YET TO MAKE HIS FIRST MISTAKE. TO BE SURE, HE IS POSTPONING CONTROVERSIAL POLITICAL DECISIONS. BUT, IN ANY EVENT, HE IS RIDING A HIGH CREST OF PERSONAL POPULARITY AND KOSCHNICK WOULD NOT BE SURPRISED IF THE CDU POLLED 55 PERCENT OF THE VOTE IN NIEDERSACHSEN. HE HAS BEEN ADVISING HIS SPD FRIENDS IN HANNOVER NOT REPEAT NOT TO ATTACK ALBRECHT
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PERSONALLY, LEST SUCH TACTICS BOOMERANG AGAINST THE SPD.

6. WITH REFERENCE TO THE CURRENT PRINTERS' STRIKE, WHICH SHUT DOWN MOST OF FRG'S NEWSPAPERS, KOSCHNICK SAID THAT, WHILE THE PRINTERS HAVE SOME LEGITIMATE CLAIMS FOR AN IMPROVED PACKAGE (VERY HIGH PROFITS OF SOME PUBLISHERS, LOSS OF JOBS THROUGH RATIONALIZATION, TERMINATION OF THEIR CONTRACT AT THE END OF THE FIRST QUARTER 1977), HE DEPLORED THE CURRENT STRIKE AND THE

DENIAL OF THE PRINTED WORD TO THE GERMAN PUBLIC. HE WAS ALSO CONCERNED ABOUT THE ADVERSE ECONOMIC IMPACT ON WEAKER PRINTING AND PUBLISHING FIRMS. HE FURTHER SAID THAT IF THE PRINTERS SUCCEED IN WINNING A SIGNIFICANTLY IMPROVED AGREEMENT, THIS WOULD POSE PROBLEMS FOR I.G. METALL, WHICH HAD SETTLED FOR LESS, AT A TIME THE AUTOMOBILE INDUSTRY IS EXPERIENCING A PRODUCTION BOOM, WITH A TRIMMED LABOR FORCE COMPARED WITH THAT BEFORE THE RECENT RECESSION AND AGAINST THE BACKGROUND OF THE INDUSTRY'S RECENT PRICE RISES.SCHIFFMAN

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